

THINK-TANK

Education, population, poverty, tax...getting views on topics like those in Jersey isn't the difficult part – but have you ever noticed how many people sound eminently credible when talking about them, even though they may actually be basing their views on conjecture, false facts and blind guesswork?

There is a real danger in making the 'facts' fit the opinion, rather than the other way around – which is exactly the point at which someone with an eye on the latest buzzwords will smugly insert the phrase 'post-truth' into the conversation, imagining its actually helpful.

So, we've asked the Jersey Policy Forum to add some robust material to those crucial local debates – the point is not to provoke agreement or acquiescence; it is to provide reliable material on which others can build their views.



Talkin' trash!

By Gailina Liew, Executive Director, Jersey Policy Forum



Have you been treasure hunting lately? Turns out that there are many places in Jersey to look for pretty much anything one might covet or find useful and all at bargain prices. The only catch is that you need to be comfortable with the fact that these things have been owned and likely cherished by someone else before you found it. So why might this be interesting as we think about the future and figure out how to rebuild economies?

As a music lover and former pianist, I was both delighted and dismayed to discover a Bechstein baby grand piano at the Glencoe auction rooms in St. Lawrence a few weeks ago. Delighted because such instruments are beautiful and each one is a work of art in itself; but dismayed to see such an instrument in a warehouse and then astounded to learn that it had sold for just £160 – the retail price would normally be in the thousands if not tens of thousands in the United Kingdom and Europe. Clearly, the new owner got an

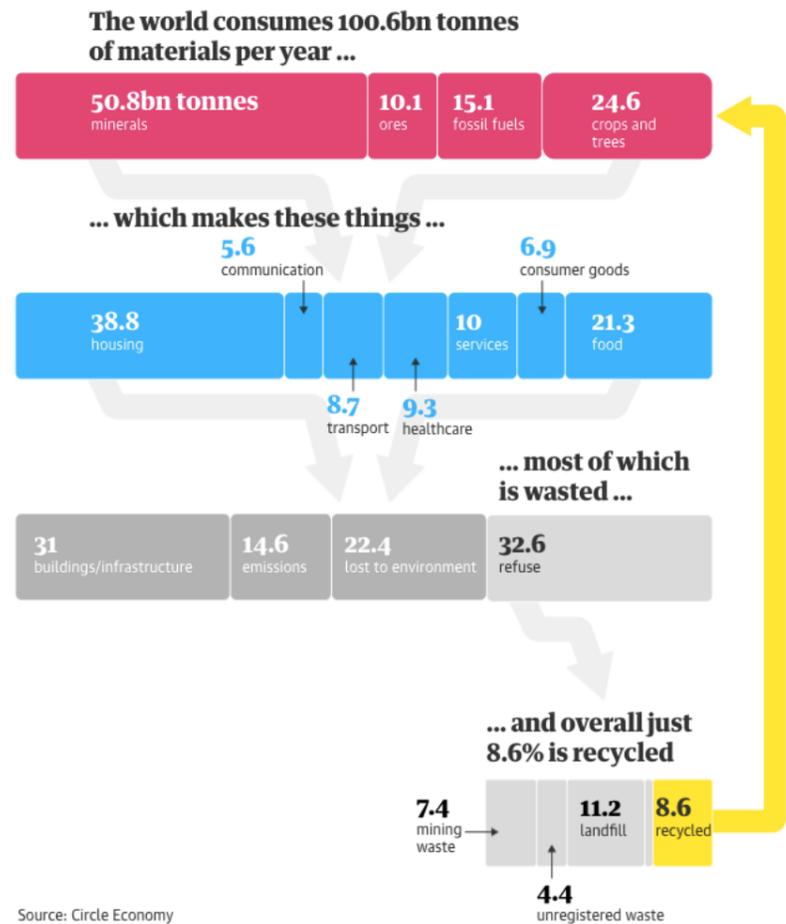
incredible bargain. What did the previous owner get? Maybe not as much cash as hoped for but there is also value in knowing that something beautiful and still useful is not going into landfill and the space that the Bechstein occupied is now available for another use. In the bigger picture, such transactions point towards a more sustainable use of scarce resources (think wood, metal, production capacity, capital, energy, skilled human labour, etc.) while reducing waste and pollution involved in processing the waste – not to mention landfill where many pianos are sadly ending up these days.

You may have heard the saying that the best form of recycling is to re-use something and the market for used goods is going strong, particularly when people are going through hard times and there is uncertainty about where the next pay cheque might be coming from, if at all. In Jersey, the Glencoe auction rooms have a waiting list for people who want to put things up for auction. Classified

ads in the paper, online and social media are crammed with items looking for a new home and charity shops around the island are so flooded with donations that many have been forced to refuse donations due to lack of space. Part of this might be due to a 'clearing out' process that many people have pursued over the lockdown period as life priorities have shifted but is there more to the story? After all, most people in wealthy nations already own more 'stuff' than they can reasonably use in their lifetimes. In addition to homes with overflowing closets, lofts and garages, there is a booming demand for storage and decluttering/home organisation services (think Mari Kondo and the Home Edit). A quick Google search in Jersey revealed at least 14 storage facilities on island. Why do we have so much stuff and feel the need to buy more?

In earlier generations, most people weighed every purchase very carefully – from eating out to buying a car. There was no such thing as fast food or fast fashion. Over the past few decades, this careful weighing of almost every purchase decision has been replaced by a constant desire to buy, promoted by governments' desires to grow economies and by manufacturing and marketing tactics to drive more consumption. The quality of many products including food has been lowered to entice consumers with lower prices and the tactics of planned and psychological obsolescence have been embedded into our practices and mindsets. Planned obsolescence limits the useful lifespan of a product by deliberately incorporating a design fault (think cheap toasters that break after a year of use, or Apple/Microsoft refusing to provide support for their products after a few years). Psychological obsolescence is essentially about mobilising social pressure to be on trend with the latest fad – think why are you wearing wide ties or kitten heels when it's actually narrow ties and wedge heels that are in? So, what has all of this consumption done for us?

Once survival needs are met, the research is clear that having more stuff does not lead to more happiness or contentment.



For many people, having a lot of stuff or feeling the constant pressure to shop and buy may actually cause stress and anxiety. In extreme cases, having too much stuff can result in hoarding behaviours that cause mental and physical harm. In January 2020, the most recent Circularity Gap Report (<http://ow.ly/5mTg50BZSS0>) was presented at Davos. A circular economy model would have zero waste so the circularity gap on a global level is still significant.

The figures in the chart are sobering. How can we rationalise the depletion of the world's limited resources when there is already so much stuff already in existence? Can we be smarter about reducing waste and re-using more? Our charity/vintage shops, auction house

and classifieds/social media sites are on the right track. More companies are also rising to this challenge. Patagonia is one of the long-recognised champions in this area with lifetime guarantees for their products (they will provide you with mailing labels and repair the problem) and they also sell worn clothing and clothing made from discarded materials (<https://wornwear.patagonia.com/>). Ikea has now entered the arena and will buy back certain used furniture from customers and resell it in their stores (<https://www.ikea.com/es/en/campaigns/sell-your-furniture-pub70f47900>). Where would comparable figures sit for Jersey? In contrast to the world's natural resources, human creativity and ingenuity is boundless. Let's be bold and creative about talkin' trash to figure out how we can close the gap!